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MARTIAL ART MEETS MARTIAL SCIENCE

By Chris Kent

I am pleased and proud to have been asked to write a series of articles for Blackbelt UK, and to share insights into such things as combative technique, training methodology, philosophy, and teaching/coaching strategies with the ever-growing legion of martial art students and fans throughout the UK.

While I may write from the perspective of a Jeet Kune Do practitioner and instructor, my goal for this and future articles is to offer material and information that any martial artist can relate to and utilize to enhance their own performance. It's my sincere hope that these articles will "communicate" and stir something within the free-thinking and creative martial artist throughout Britain. Regardless of your political viewpoint in relation to Jeet Kune Do, or whether you study another martial art, I ask you not to bifurcate into an "either/or" situation, but instead, read the articles with an open mind and take in the whole picture. Thank you.

The Art is both a "Science" and an "Art"
Knowledge of the art is the "Science"
Doing of the art is the "Art"

Bruce Lee

In the mid 1960's, a "revolutionary" new approach to martial art training developed by a brilliant young martial artist named Bruce Lee suddenly burst onto the scene. Welcomed by some martial artists, yet abhorred by many die-hard traditionalists and fundamentalists, the art, known as Jeet Kune Do, sent a shock wave through the martial arts community, the ripples of which are still being felt to this day. "Revolutionary" is a term often used to describe someone or something that defies the status quo and overthrows established tradition or institution, and that's exactly what Jeet Kune Do did, in many ways changing the face of the martial arts forever

To get a clear picture of just how different Jeet Kune Do was from other martial arts being taught, it's helpful (and necessary) to understand what the martial world was like at the time, as well as the mindset of most martial artists. Unlike today's more sophisticated audience, in the 1960's the general public was for the most part uneducated about the world of martial arts. Their perception was based primarily upon techniques they'd seen in secret agent movies like "In Like Flint" and "From Russia With Love". In the martial art industry at the time, each school often claimed to have the best system or style, and the majority of them were like factories in which all students came out looking like exact molded replicas of the instructor. The individual was never taken into consideration because the system itself was more important than any person, and stressed that everyone must do the same things in exactly the same way. Tradition was the order of the day. In most of the schools the students spent their time practicing numerous katas (forms), and repeating static, single techniques at imaginary targets or opponents. When sparring took place it was usually pre-planned one, two or three-step sparring. When tournaments were held, the contests were for the most part non-contact fights in which blows were pulled, and a group of judges decided the winner based upon whose blows were more deadly or would have been more damaging had they landed, etc. To cross-train in various martial art styles was unthinkable and in many cases considered sacrilegious. If your instructor discovered you training in another discipline you would either be kicked out of the school or subjected to a severe disciplining to "show you the error of your ways."

What made Jeet Kune Do so different and separated it from other martial arts being taught at the time was that it was the first martial art to bring the western concept of pragmatic function to the Eastern concept of Gung Fu. In other words, instead of bringing tradition, JKD brought "science" to bear on the world of unarmed combat. And to look to science, as opposed to tradition, was, for the most part, unheard of at the time. Jeet Kune Do was, and is, the harmonious interfusion of martial art and martial science.

The "Science" of Unarmed Combat

How does science fit into the martial art picture? The dictionary defines "Science" as -- *"Systematized knowledge derived from observation, study, and experimentation carried on in order to determine the nature or principles of what is being studied..."* The essence of science consists of setting up plausible hypotheses and then experimenting and checking to uphold or disprove them. A hypothesis is not a fact, but rather only a supposition, an unproven theory. And through research and experimentation the scientist checks the hypothesis to see if it's correct. If it proves false, he or she rejects it and tries a new hypothesis. If it seems correct, they tentatively keep it, but always stand ready to change it later if evidence against it arises. While hardly infallible, science is probably the best method we have of discovering "truth" and understanding "reality". But science isn't merely the use of logic and facts to verify or falsify a theory. It consists of continually revising and changing theories and trying to replace them with more valid ones as new information arises. Science is flexible rather than rigid, open-minded instead of dogmatic. It avoids all-or-none and either/or thinking. Perhaps even more important, it strives for greater truth but not for absolute and perfect truth.

Bruce Lee was engaged in what could best be described as an on-going research project to discover the most efficient form of unarmed combat (for self-defense, not sport). To accomplish this quest he invested countless thousands of hours of time, effort and energy, and accumulated an incredible amount of information and knowledge. During his search for the fundamental truth or "essence" underlying efficient human movement in combat, one of the first observations Lee made was that, regardless of their origins, martial art is a form of athletic endeavor in that it involves bodily movement. As such, regardless of style or method, they all followed similar bio-mechanical principles factors as body mechanics, time, force, speed, motion, endurance, etc. For example, the human body is comprised of weights (mass of body segments), levers (bones) and devices for producing force (muscles and nerves). As such it responds to the laws of mechanics just as any other system of weights and levers. This understanding led Lee to study the science of physics. He reasoned that when it comes to fighting, the science of physics, which includes such things as gravity, friction, momentum, weight transmission and unison of forces, is the foundation for the entire enterprise. For example, relating Newton's Three Laws of Motion to martial arts, Lee worked out how the body weights can be handled so as to maintain stability at rest or in motion (or to use instability to advantage), and to produce and control force in the various types of combative actions so that the desired results can be obtained with the least strain and a minimal expenditure of energy. In other words, how to achieve maximum results using minimum energy.

Another thing Lee recognized was that anatomically and physiologically, as human beings, we are all essentially the same. And while it may be true that certain anatomical and physiological features may vary among individuals, such variations exist within a very limited and quantifiable range, without altering the fact that the basic governing principles are the same. This understanding led Lee to study anatomy, physiology, and kinesiology and apply principles from these sciences to martial art requisites such as body alignment, speed, power and coordination.

Lee sought to create a scientific approach to martial art that was predicated on sound demonstrable principles that were applicable to all human beings. While his research covered every aspect of training, including such things as balance, speed, power, coordination, precision, distance, timing,

rhythm, endurance and strength, etc., it can be separated into two primary components:

1) Technical

Basically, the natural weapons (tools) available to a martial artist are universal. These weapons include our hands, feet, elbows, knees, forearm, and head. As Lee noted, *"Basically we have two arms and two legs. The idea is how to use them to the maximum."* Realizing that there are only so many ways that each limb can be used, Lee analyzed human patterns of attack. He examined and categorized all of the possible moves that can be made with the right arm, left arm, right leg, left leg, and noted the various paths the various weapons can travel such as straight, upward, downward, from outward in, from inward out, etc. Lee worked to find out how each blow was made and how it could be made more powerful. For example, he would take a particular technique such as a side kick and then analyze what particular muscles and levers were involved by asking such questions as, "What muscles are the prime movers? What muscles are the antagonists? How can I loosen the antagonists prior to delivering the kick?

2) Fitness

Lee believed that, in terms of combat, physical conditioning was the foundation that other important factors such as technique training and mental cultivation ultimately rested upon. While technique is very important, it can be useless if you lack the requisite endurance, strength or power to carry it out. Lee viewed his body as the machine that drove his technique, and recognized that it is how finely tuned a martial artist's "machine" is that allows them the opportunity to deploy their weapons effectively. As a result he was constantly researching ways to make his own "engine" more powerful and efficient.

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The "Educated Eye" and "Discerning Mind"

Through his studious research into physics, human physiology and kinesiology, as well as countless thousands of hours of training and experimentation, Lee developed what is known in JKD as the "educated eye" and the "discerning mind". This meant that he could look at things from his scientific vantage point and know right away whether a technique was efficient or inefficient, not based upon some nebulous category of which technique was "the best" in any given style, but in terms of scientific pragmatism. This in turn allowed him to quickly discern a useful technique or motion from an unproductive or non-useful one. Lee was able to glean the science behind any martial art movement. He would analyze a technique or motion, break it down into its components parts and examine it closely, asking such questions as:

1. Is this particular principle or technique valid or not?
2. Why is it effective?
3. How does it relate to me?
4. Does it have application to what I am doing?

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10. Can it be used efficiently and effectively under pressure?
11. Can it be made more effective?

Lee understood that theory without application means nothing, and like any good scientist, was not content with mere theorizing but rather sought empirical proof. He refused to accept something as a valid way to approach the practice of martial art if a person couldn't prove or justify why it worked.

Furthermore, he was always willing to modify or throw out a concept, motion or technique when he felt they were outdated or when new information became available.

When You Understand "Motion", You Don't Need "Style" –

Lee was looking to find the most efficient way for a human being to move in combat without getting hung up or being confined to any sort of blanket approach such as a particular style or system. He didn't look at styles individually but rather collectively, in their totality, seeing the common denominator that connected the most efficient and effective components of all styles. My teacher, Dan Inosanto used to tell me all the time, "When Bruce looked at various styles of martial arts, he didn't look for differences, but rather for similarities, for the common threads that run through all martial arts." Bruce was interested in "totality" in combat as opposed to partiality. One of his most oft-repeated quotes is, *"There is no such thing as an effective segment of a totality."* To achieve this Lee moved past such things as ideological concerns, nationalities, tradition, and perhaps most important of all, the idea or notion of "style". As he often said, *"When you understand motion, you don't need "style."*

What It Means To You As A Martial Artist

So how, you may be asking, does all of this relate to me? The point to understand is that the sources that Lee drew from, were not written exclusively for him, but for all individuals. These sources are available for you as well, if you choose to use them. And many of today's world champions do. Take a look at the number of people now cross-training in various martial arts and the rapid rise of "mixed-martial art" fighting events. No matter what type of martial artist you happen to be, a professional fighter or a recreational practitioner, or what particular style or method of martial art you practice, you can gain by looking beyond the confines of the martial art style you train in and taking a scientific approach to your training. Such an approach will help you avoid all-or-none and either/or thinking. If you are consistently scientific and flexible about your findings you will not escalate them into self-defeating dogmas. Some people erroneously believe that unless you possess "Bruce Lee-like" attributes, attempting to use his training methods is waste of time. This directly opposes Lee's own beliefs and the laws of human physiology, because the principles that Lee absorbed and utilized in the formulation of JKD apply to every martial artist. Physics, bio-mechanics are universal disciplines and not subject to arbitrary change in individuals. The bio-chemical changes that result in increased speed or strength are essentially the same for you as well as me. What is different and unique are our own personalities. While some individuals will develop faster than others due to a greater innate adaptability, all of us become better martial artists when we learn to train scientifically. What science reveals are requisite requirements for building such things as speed, power, endurance, etc. So be aware of scientific principles at work in the martial arts. Research the mechanics and science of combat thoroughly in order to learn more effective techniques and training methods and increase your level of performance.

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Conclusion

Where the scientific principles take you on your path as a martial artist is more important than where they are from. Lee always spoke about "personal liberation" being the most important goal of any true martial artist. Learn how to grow in all areas by applying yourself diligently to your total martial art growth. Look at what you are doing as a form of scientific research. Break down a motion or technique into its component parts, analyze its strengths and weaknesses, and if possible, structure it into an even stronger action. Find out and understand for yourself what is the most efficient movement in combat for you as a human being. Don't simply follow the "way" of someone else (be it Bruce Lee or anybody else for that matter). Question, probe, seek out the truth for yourself. But also be aware of your own prejudices that may obstruct your vision of the reality you seek. As martial artists and human beings, each day offers us the opportunity to improve ourselves physically and mentally, and it's our choice as to whether we seize the moment and take a step closer to maximizing our potential and progress, or decline the opportunity and stagnate or regress. I wish each of you well on your journey toward personal liberation. Until next month, may it be well with you.

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